
The Catalyst Model

J.I.F. Reppun MD

Reprinted from an Editorial by our Late Editor, Fred Reppun - Hawaii Medical Journal July 1987



Robert T. Wong MD

We have in our medical midst a catalyzer, one who makes things happen.

What has happened is an annual lectureship at our university's School of Medicine that has brought to Hawaii prestigious medical scientists, leaders in the forefront of innovative approaches to the resolving of tough medical problems that affect the health of all people. This very special event bears the name of The Robert T. Wong, MD, Lectureship.

In 1985, it was Gallo, the co-discoverer of the HIV as the cause

of AIDS. In 1986, Lansing of Humana described his work with the Jarvik-7 artificial heart, and in April this year it was Steven Rosenberg MD, PhD, from the NCI in Bethesda who described his innovative approach to cancer treatment with his "Adoptive Immunotherapy" using lymphokine-activated killer lymphocytes mixed in with Interleukin-2.

Who has made this happen? Our own senior ophthalmologist Robert T. "Bob" Wong, MD, of course.

Before we delve into how Bob Wong became "the catalyzer" let's examine the man: Where did he come from, who is he and how did he happen to fill this role?

Bob has been practicing medicine for 46 years—he still is—still in the same location in downtown Honolulu where Union Mall now joins Bishop Street. He is 76 years old.

His father, Wong Hing came from China as a young man to work on the sugar plantations of the Big Island, but only for a short while. He became the cook for the Lyman family in Hilo and then went out on his own as the proprietor of Planters Market and of a small leasehold ranch in Olaa. He married a girl from Waianae on Oahu and they raised 15 children, of whom 12 are surviving. Bob was number three and Jimmy Wong, Ob/Gyn in Honolulu was number five, the only two who became doctors, although all were well-educated.

Bob was born in Hilo, went to Hilo High School and then the University of Hawaii from which he graduated in 1932. He went on to Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia, graduating in 1936 after winning the gold medal in physiology and becoming a reserve officer in the U.S. Army. After 27 months of a rotating internship at Jefferson Medical College Hospital, he put in a year of active duty with the military and then went back to academia, and then to a residency in ophthalmology at Cleveland City Hospital. He was granted a master of medical science degree by the University of

Pennsylvania in 1946.

On December 10, 1940 Robert was appointed ophthalmologist to the Western Reserve University 4th General Hospital with the rank of Captain. He was the only non-faculty member and moreover, a mere resident. This was a truly remarkable event. He missed going overseas to Brisbane, Australia, with the unit early in 1942, when it was activated, because he came back to Hawaii in July 1941 at the end of his residency training. He was in Mabel Smyth together with others of the HCMS on Sunday morning, December 7, 1941, when the Japanese fleet attacked Pearl Harbor. The doctors were immediately given assignments to duty by the head of the Civil Defense, Bob Faus, MD, who was conducting the meeting at the time, and Wong found himself at Queen's drawing blood for the blood bank for the next several days. Henry Dixon, Faus' deputy, later assigned Bob to a small, makeshift army hospital in a school at the corner of 19th and Wai'alae in Kaimuki, to prepare for casualties in case of a Japanese invasion that never materialized.

Bob had opened an office for the private practice of ophthalmology on Union Street in September 1941. So, for a year, he divided his time between his own practice and the military. He served as ophthalmologist to both the Alsup and the Fronk Clinics next door. He served as surgical assistant to Dr. F.J. Pinkerton from 1941-1948. In those days, the only other ophthalmologists in Hawaii were F.J. Pinkerton, Cowan, Holmes, Robert Lee Sr., Moffat, Trexler, and Minatoya.

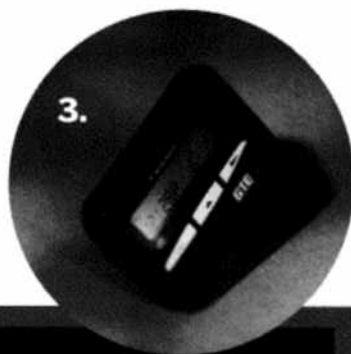
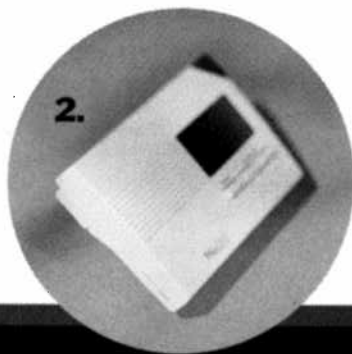
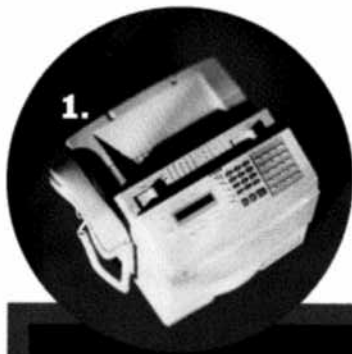
One of Robert's most satisfactory lifetime achievements was serving as ophthalmology consultant to the Hawaii Hansen's Disease program from 1946 to 1992.

Wong was appointed a consultant to the leprosarium at Kalaupapa, Molokai, in 1946 and he used to fly over frequently until 1950, after which he served the lepers at Hale Mohalu in Honolulu until its demise a few years ago.

Bob had met Harriet Leong, the sister of his college classmate, and they were married in 1934. Bob's satisfaction in having their two sons follow in their father's footsteps is patently manifest. Stephen, born in 1946, is professor of ophthalmology at Temple; Bradley, born in 1950, is a general surgeon in Honolulu. The father and two sons make an impossible picture in their American College of Surgeons formal trappings, as a threesome.

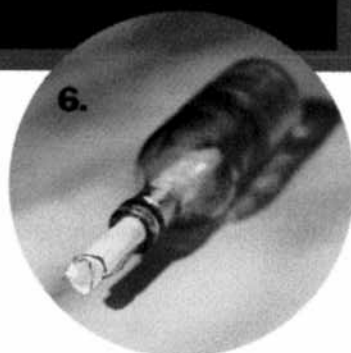
Robert Wong was president of the Hawaii Chapter of the ACS in 1961 and of the Honolulu County Medical Society in 1965. He became intensely interested in the idea of a medical school at the University of Hawaii, but let us tell the story in his own words:

"At the height of his regime, Governor Burns decided to expand the University. He was informed that the only recourse lay in the expansion in the field of biological sciences. In 1964, Dr Allen B. Richardson (senior) and I were invited to lunch at Ciro's with the then UH president Hamilton and his legal



**There are all kinds of ways to
send a message in Hawaii.**

**We'll take credit for
numbers one through five.**



We regret to say we don't offer message in a bottle. But we do offer plenty of other ways to communicate, like faxing, caller I.D., paging, voice messaging, Internet service, the list goes on and on. And they're all from one company. GTE Hawaiian Tel. We've been helping businesses communicate for over a century. To improve your own communication skills, stop by any GTE Phone Mart, visit our web site at www.gte.com, or call 643-4411.

GTE Hawaiian Tel
Beyond the call

Products and services available in most areas.

counsel Kenneth Lau. When we were overcome with too much wine and delicious servings of shrimp scampi and pasta, my longtime friend Kenneth Lau asked what we thought of a 2-year medical school at UH. Without hesitation and with no thought to protocol, Richardson and I gave the two of them our personal approval. At the time, Richardson was president-elect of the HMA and I was president-elect of the county medical society. Within a week, we received letters thanking us for 'pledging the support of the medical community'! A short time later, the remarkable Terence Roger, PhD, chairman of the University's Department of Physiology, was appointed as a task force of one and ordered to proceed with the creation of the school of medicine.

"Dr Windsor Cutting, former Dean of Stanford Medical School, was selected as the Dean of the new school. A feasibility study was processed and within a short two or three months a quonset hut was moved to the northeast corner of the university campus. A professor of anatomy and a professor of pharmacology were appointed; the quonset hut was listed as the Department of Anatomy and Biological Research Building, and the medical school was formally dedicated. The first Professor of Medicine was Richard Blaisdell, MD.

Documentation of Robert Wong's participation in the establishment of the UH School of Medicine contained in a Hawaii Medical Journal report of Dean Terence Rogers' Retirement Dinner Speech. "It was your support which made it all possible. I met with Robert Wong, HMA president, at Leahi. He stood up and said, 'Let's cut out the BS and start the medical school.' Very crude language!!! but very effective!"

"By contrast, the Hershey School of Medicine of the Pennsylvania State University had taken nearly ten years to plan, and had required almost a hundred million dollars to construct. Even so, it nearly failed of fruition, had it not been taken over by the State University.

"Without any funding from the State of Hawaii, Task Force Rogers almost singlehandedly, with a little help from the NIH, brought into being the UHSM. The final miracle performed by Dr Rogers was to obtain the necessary certificate of accreditation, which was granted with almost no reservations.

"The primary reason for the existence of this medical school is to raise and maintain a high standard and quality of medical care in the State of Hawaii."

From a deep sense of obligation to his parents and to his brothers and sisters who had made sacrifices on his behalf, and to his own good fortune in having become a physician at the feet of Aesculapius in Philadelphia, Bob Wong had devoted himself to supporting the John A. Burns School of Medicine these past 20 years. However, he has jumped ahead and he is now quite enthused over the success of the current annual lectureship program which has furthered the original purpose of the establishment of the medical school, i.e. to elevate the standard of medical care in the community. We quote from Bob once more:

"I have supported the medical school since its inception. My lectureship, however, was established as a result of an unusual chain of circumstances. Several years ago I helped a young man gain admission to Jefferson Medical College. Subsequently, his grateful mother Jean Wong, a dedicated academician, died and in her legacy left \$15,000 at the UH School of Medicine in my name. In 1984 I matched that initial contribution in order to start the Fund. Since then, it has grown to over \$300,000, thanks to gifts from other friends and colleagues, and in particular a major contribution from the estate of Beatrice Watson Parrent. The lectureship has created an important annual scientific contribution to medicine in Hawaii."

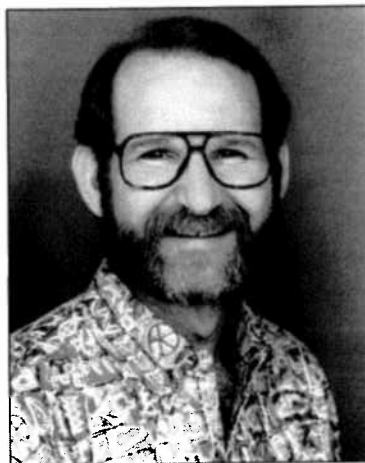
Robert Wong, the catalyzer, is particularly pleased that as a result of Dr Gallo's visit to Hawaii in 1985, the Blood Bank of Hawaii began to test every donor for HIV, thus assuring its non-transmissibility via blood transfusions (which very likely may have happened before then). He is pleased that Dr Lansing's visit may have helped inspire Livingston Wong and Ricardo Moreno to proceed with the first heart transplant in Hawaii recently, and Bob is hoping that Rosenberg's lecture may stimulate cancer research in Hawaii to greater heights.

With Bob as a model, perhaps others in the profession will become similarly imbued with an urge to establish forever living memorials.

Editor's Note:

Bob Wong is a true catalyst, as the you will see in this issue and part II of the Special Issues on Ophthalmology.

Beginning with Bob's History of Ophthalmology in Hawaii, we have excellent manuscripts by, Doctors Sugiki, Drouilhet, Kokame, Camara, Yamamoto and our contributing editor Russell Stodd. Russ has excellent vision—he sees "Ophthalmology in Hawaii in 1997 and Beyond." Look for part II next month.



mel r. hertz MBA, CFP

Certified Financial Planner

Retirement Plans

Investment Management Consulting

Charitable Remainder Trusts

522-0100

Pacific Tower, Suite 2944, 1001 Bishop Street

derand

capital management group

Securities offered through IFC Network Securities, Inc. (IFC), member NASD and SIPC. Financial planning services through Associated Financial Planners, Inc. (AFCP).



registered investment advisor mel r. hertz is a registered principal of IFC and an associated person of its affiliate AFCP, both of which are otherwise unaffiliated with derand.

**Medical
miracles start
with research**

**American Heart
AssociationSM**
Fighting Heart Disease
and Stroke

